

**Greater Suttle Lake Vegetation Management Project
Scenic Resources Effects Analysis Report**

**Robin Gyorgyfalvy, Landscape Architect
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Introduction

This scenic resources report is an effects analysis for a project proposal to manage forest vegetation in the greater Suttle Lake recreation area northwest of Sisters, Oregon. The area is 247 acres around Suttle Lake at an elevation of 3,500 to 4,000 feet and accessed from Highway 20 and Forest Roads 2066 and 2070. The greater Suttle Lake area has some of the highest recreation use of the Sisters Ranger District with its two organizational camps, four campgrounds, four day-use areas, and numerous non-motorized trails providing connections between lakes. The project area is located within a Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) which is described in the *Greater Sisters Country Community Wildfire Protection Plan*. Goals for the WUI include safe egress of the public and ingress of fire management equipment and personnel in the event of wildfire.

Proposed Action

The purpose of the proposed action is to provide public health and safety, protect and maintain infrastructure, ensure safe public occupancy of developed recreation areas, and reduce impacts of tree diseases.

The proposed action takes a comprehensive approach to managing vegetation in this intensive recreation area. There would be felling of danger trees and hazard trees to protect the public and reduce potential damage to recreation infrastructure. There would also be selective harvesting to improve overall forest health by reducing the extent of dwarf mistletoe and addressing susceptible host trees in areas with stem and root diseases. Reforestation, seeding, and transplanting of disease resistant tree species would occur. Felled trees may be left on site to meet down wood needs or removed as forest products to maintain safe recreational experience and reduce fuel loading or moved to support habitat restoration activities such as in-stream work to restore fish habitat.

Management Direction

The Forest Plan for the Deschutes National Forest provides standards and guidelines for an array of land uses referred to as Management Areas. This analysis focuses on the Management Area for Intensive Recreation (MA-11) which is referred to by page number in the *Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan* and described in terms of desired future conditions for various settings and how these are to be met by specified activities or actions. The Scenery Management System (SMS) is the methodology used by Forest Service landscape architects since 1996 to provide a visual impact assessment of effects to scenic resources which integrates social impacts to recreation visitors with physical impacts to the visitor experience.

Intensive Recreation – MA11 (LRMP pages 4-135 to 4-138)

The goal of the Intensive Recreation Management Area is to provide a wide variety of quality outdoor recreation opportunities within a Forest environment where the localized

settings may be modified to accommodate large numbers of visitors. (Undeveloped recreation opportunities may occur in this management area).

Mixed Conifers:

M11-21 Mixed conifer stands will be managed to perpetuate or enhance the characteristic (or natural) landscape. The characteristic landscape normally contains stands that are visually dense, though not necessarily continuous. Diversity in tree and shrub species and in diameter classes produces the desired visual character when viewed from recreation use areas.

M11-22 Small, natural appearing openings are desirable, and are an important visual element of the characteristic landscape in mixed conifer stands.

M11-23 Large diameter old growth characteristics are an important visual component. Ponderosa pine is a desirable component of these stands, where it either exists or could be introduced.

Visual:

M11-35 Within existing or future developed areas, management activities and facilities will meet a Scenery Management System of **Low Scenic Integrity (SMS)** or Modification (VMS). This refers to landscapes where the valued landscape character “appears moderately altered.” Deviations begin to dominate the valued landscape character being viewed but they borrow valued attributes such as size, shape, edge effect and pattern of natural openings, vegetative type changes or architectural styles outside the landscape being viewed. They should not appear as valued character outside the landscape being viewed but compatible or complimentary to the character within.

M11-36 Areas outside of developed areas will be managed so they meet the inventoried scenic quality standards as defined in the Scenery Management System.

Danger Trees along Forest Roads:

There is a mix of land allocations that occurs along four miles of Forest Roads 2066 and 2070 where felling of danger trees would occur with removal of danger trees within 100 feet of the road edge. In addition to Intensive Recreation, there are Bald Eagle (MA-3), General Forest (MA-8), Matrix (MA-8), and Late-Successional Reserve.

Analysis Methods

Scenery Management Objectives are defined in terms of Scenic Integrity Levels which describe existing conditions and whether the landscape is visually perceived to be “complete” or not. The most complete or highest rating for Scenic Integrity Levels means having little or no deviation from the landscape character that makes it appealing and attractive to visitors and local residents. In addition to describing existing conditions, Scenic Integrity Levels also describe the level of development allowed and ways to mitigate deviations from the area’s landscape character.

Methodology used for analyzing impacts to scenic resources is the Scenery Management System (SMS) which uses “***Landscape Aesthetics: A Handbook for Scenery Management***” issued in 1996. This new handbook replaces “***Agriculture Handbook 462 – The Visual Management System (VMS)***” issued in 1974. While many of the basic inventory elements of the Visual Management System are retained, the Scenery Management System incorporates both the natural and human processes into the ideas of managing for ecosystems and is the current methodology used by the Forest Service to inventory and evaluate impacts to scenic resources.

To facilitate this change in methodology to SMS, a crosswalk is used to reference both systems in the following manner with current SMS methodology in bold and outdated VMS in parentheses: ***High Scenic Integrity - SMS*** (Retention - VMS)

- **High Scenic Integrity - SMS** - Natural Appearing Landscape (Retention – VMS) - MA 9, SV-1 Foreground, SV-3 Middleground
- **Moderate Scenic Integrity - SMS** - Slightly Altered Landscape (Partial Retention – VMS) - MA 9, SV-2 Foreground, SV-4 Middleground
- **Low Scenic Integrity - SMS** - Altered Landscape (Modification – VMS or General Forest) - MA 8, GFO within Foreground as well as Middleground

The distance zones for Scenic Views management areas for an observer are as follows:

- Immediate Foreground 0 - 300 feet
- Foreground 0 - ½ mile
- Middleground ½ mile - 4 miles
- Background 4 miles - horizon

Direct and Indirect Effects

Adjacent Areas (23 acres): These three areas are located between and adjacent to each of the campgrounds on the south shore of Suttle Lake. They provide a buffer between the developed campgrounds and beach areas along the shoreline. They also provide shaded forested areas along the Suttle Lake Loop Trail.

The desired future condition in maintaining this vegetative screen between developed campgrounds would be important through selective tree removal as well as future planting, transplanting, and/or seeding with future tree replacements as well as understory shrub, grass, and forb plantings. Depending upon number of trees removed, these areas could become more open in the short-term time frame but would become more enclosed in the long-term time frame as new plants fill in and become established.

This is a landscape where the valued landscape character “appears moderately altered” so its classification of **Low Scenic Integrity – SMS** (Modification – VMS) would be met through efforts to retain the landscape character of this high use recreation area setting over time.

Campgrounds (84 acres): Units 1-4 are within the three campgrounds located on the south shore of Suttle Lake (Link Creek, South Shore, and Blue Bay) and within the campground located on the north shore of Scout Lake (Scout Lake Campground). Depending upon the number and location of hazard trees to be removed throughout these campgrounds, the visible impacts would be a more open setting in the short-term time frame with possibly more open views to the water as well as throughout the campground. In the areas between camping sites, between the campground and the main entry Road 2070, and along riparian and beach areas, additional understory plantings and disease resistant trees would provide future visual screenings and help control foot traffic between public day-use spaces and private camping sites where needed.

The desired future visual condition is to maintain clumps of trees with varying size, heights, species, and density in order to create interest, visual relief and dscreening throughout the campground between camping sites, roads, and common areas (toilets, water, parking, trails). Any removal of large trees or groups of trees should be coordinated in tandem with replanting of smaller trees especially if the removal of existing trees results in less screening or buffering between camping sites, road, and common areas.

This is a landscape where the valued landscape character “appears moderately altered” so its classification of **Low Scenic Integrity – SMS** (Modification – VMS) would be met through efforts to retain the landscape character of this high use recreation area setting over time.

Organizational Camps (56 acres): Units 5a, 5b, and 5c are located at the organizational camp called Suttle Lake United Methodist Camp at the northeast end of Suttle Lake and Unit 6 is the other organizational camp known as Camp Tamarack on the north side of Dark Lake. Depending upon the number and location of hazard trees to be removed throughout these campgrounds, the visible impacts would be a more open setting in the short-term time frame with possibly more open views to the water as well as throughout the campground.

In the areas between camping sites, between the campground and the main entry Road 2070, and along riparian and beach areas, additional understory plantings and disease resistant trees would provide future visual screenings and help control foot traffic between public day-use spaces and private camping sites where needed.

The desired future visual condition is to maintain clumps of trees with varying size, heights, species, and density in order to create interest, visual relief and screening throughout the campground between cabins, camping sites, recreation activity areas, roads, and common areas (amphitheatres, archery ranges, boat ramps, picnic areas). Any removal of large trees or groups of trees should be coordinated in tandem with replanting of smaller trees especially if the removal of existing trees results in less screening or buffering between camping sites, road, and common areas.

This is a landscape where the valued landscape character “appears moderately altered” so its classification of **Low Scenic Integrity – SMS** (Modification – VMS) would be met through efforts to retain the landscape character of this high use recreation area setting over time.

Roads (83 acres): Unit 8 is located along Forest Road 2070 and Unit 7 is located along Forest Road 2066. There are four miles along Forest Roads 2070 and 2066 that would be assessed for danger trees to be removed within 100 feet of the road edge. Slash would be piled and treated after timber felling operations are completed. Impacts to scenic quality would be minimized with slash being removed a different location where burning or other means of disposal would occur. Views into the forest from the roads would be more open depending upon number and location of trees removed. Screening between roads and campgrounds would need to be planted or transplanted to improve scenic quality over the long-term.

The desired future visual condition is to maintain clumps of trees with varying size, heights, species, and density in order to create interest, visual relief and screening along the roads to provide a buffer to the campgrounds and organizational camps. Any removal of large trees or groups of trees should be coordinated in tandem with replanting of smaller trees especially if the removal of existing trees results in less screening or buffering between the road and campgrounds, organizational camps, and common areas.

This is a landscape where the valued landscape character “appears moderately altered” so its classification of **Low Scenic Integrity – SMS** (Modification – VMS) would be met through efforts to retain the landscape character of this high use recreation area setting over time.

Cumulative Effects

Cumulative effects would impact scenic quality during the short-term (0 to 5 years). Over the long-term (more than 5 years) overall scenic quality would be met due to treatments to achieve diversity in tree and shrub species and in diameter classes to meet the desired visual character when viewed from recreation use area. With declining forest health conditions, public safety and scenic quality would be compromised. Clean-up of landings and slash files would need to be done in Foreground areas as soon as possible to protect scenic quality.

Past

- Suttle Lake Methodist Camp – est. 1925
- Camp Tamarack – est. 1935
- Suttle Lake campgrounds – est. early 1920s; upgrades in the 1960s
- Trail construction
- Hazard tree abatement in campgrounds
- Danger tree abatement along roads
- 2003 B&B fire – 90,962 acres
- Suttle Lake Dam Project

Present

- Hazard tree abatement in campgrounds
- Danger tree abatement along roads
- Suttle Lake Trails Project

Future

- Hazard tree abatement in campgrounds (as needed)
- Danger tree abatement along roads (as needed)
- Suttle Lake Boat Docks
- Link Creek Aquatic Restoration Project

Project Design Criteria/Resource Protection Recommendations

- Any removal of large trees or groups of trees should be in tandem with replanting smaller trees especially if the removal of the existing trees results in less screening or buffering between camping sites, roads, and common areas.
- Determination of best tree removal methods and timing to avoid peak summer campground use, regrading to correct drainage and soil erosion problems, and scarification of compacted areas for successful plant establishment are recommended.
- Clean-up activities in treatment areas including landings, skid trails, and slash piles will not be visible to the casual forest visitor after the work has been completed.
- Minimize ground disturbance and damage to vegetation in Foreground treatment areas along scenic travel corridors and access roads to recreation sites and trailheads.
- Minimize the amount of cut tree blue marking paint that is visible from scenic travel corridors, trails, and access roads to recreation sites and use leave tree marking paint on the side of the tree away from the road. Remove all flagging and unit boundary tags when treatment activities are completed in these areas as soon as possible.
- Stumps visible from the campground and along Roads 2070 and 2066 should be cut 6-8" or as low as possible (with angle cut away from line of sight) within the immediate Foreground area (0-300 feet).

References

USDA Forest Service, 1990. Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan)

USDA Forest Service, 1996. *Landscape Aesthetics, A Handbook for Scenery Management*